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Alternatives Evaluation Moving Forward

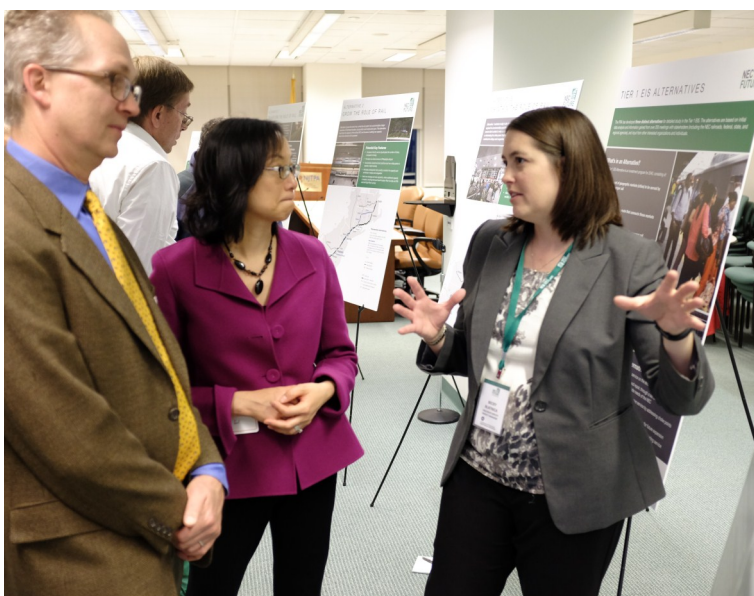
The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is moving forward on developing a long term vision for train service on the Northeast Corridor (NEC) and a program of phased improvements that would be required to support enhanced service, add new markets, and meet the region's future mobility needs. The NEC FUTURE team is currently evaluating alternatives as part of the Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Tier 1 Draft EIS). The alternatives selected for detailed evaluation in the Tier 1 Draft EIS are based on technical and collaborative reviews, as well as feedback from more than 200 stakeholder meetings and multiple public engagement activities over the past two years.

Three Action Alternatives, as well as a No Action Alternative, were discussed at a series of public open house meetings in November (see Public Open House article, below). Each Action Alternative presents a different vision for meeting future rail transportation needs, while addressing aging infrastructure, enhancing capacity, connectivity, performance and resiliency, and promoting economic growth and environmental sustainability.

(cont'd on page 2)

Tier 1 EIS Alternatives Introduced at Public Open Houses

Nearly 400 participants attended a series of NEC FUTURE public open house meetings hosted by the FRA in November 2014. The purpose of the meetings was to introduce the alternatives being developed for evaluation in the Tier 1 Draft EIS and provide an opportunity for the public to learn about NEC FUTURE, ask questions, and provide comments.



The open house meetings were held in each of the eight NEC states and the District of Columbia. The meetings included display stations with an overview of NEC FUTURE, the Tier 1 EIS Alternatives, and the environmental review process. At each station, NEC FUTURE team members engaged in one-on-one discussions with meeting participants and responded to questions and comments.

A video featuring FRA officials and footage from the corridor provided additional background on the objectives of NEC FUTURE. In addition, an animated video demonstrated the tremendous volume and mix of trains that operate on the NEC throughout the day. Both videos, as well as the meeting display boards, are available for viewing on the NEC FUTURE website at http://www.necfuture.com/get_involved/public_meetings.aspx.

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Alternatives Evaluation Moving Forward – cont'd from page 1

A description of each alternative follows:

► **No Action Alternative:**

The No Action Alternative represents the condition of the Northeast region's multi-modal transportation system in 2040 without the NEC FUTURE investment program. It serves as a baseline for comparison with the three Action Alternatives. The No Action Alternative includes improvements to the rail system that are currently planned and programmed, as well as planned highway and airport upgrades. It includes a modest proportion of the significant backlog of work associated with bringing the NEC to a state of good repair. Under the No Action Alternative, NEC rail services do not keep pace with the region's growth, and as a result, service quality is likely to decline. More information can be found in the No Action Alternative Report on the website: www.necfuture.com.

► **Alternative 1: Maintain the Current Role of Rail:**

Alternative 1 maintains the role of rail as it is today, with sufficient service levels to keep pace with the significant growth projected in the region's population, employment, and travel demand. This alternative expands capacity, adds tracks, and relieves key chokepoints, particularly through northern New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut.

► **Alternative 2: Grow the Role of Rail:**

Alternative 2 expands the role of rail to accommodate a greater proportion of Northeast travelers as population and employment grow. South of New Haven, CT, service and infrastructure improvements are focused generally within the existing NEC, while north of New Haven, a new supplemental, two-track route is added between New Haven, Hartford, and Providence. Alternative 2 serves new markets, reduces trip times, and addresses capacity constraints to support a very significant growth in rail traffic. The existing NEC expands to four tracks, with six tracks through portions of New Jersey and southwestern Connecticut.

► **Alternative 3: Transform the Role of Rail:**

Alternative 3 transforms the role of rail in the Northeast, positioning it as a dominant mode for travel in the region. In addition to upgrading the existing NEC, Alternative 3 includes a new two-track second spine that supports high-performance rail services between major markets, provides significant reduction in travel time, and provides additional system capacity. South of New York, the second spine closely parallels the existing NEC, while adding new stations in downtown Baltimore, downtown Philadelphia, and at Philadelphia International Airport.

What's in an Alternative?

Each Tier 1 EIS Alternative is an investment program for 2040, consisting of:



A set of geographic markets (cities) to be served by passenger rail



A representative route that connects these markets



Assumptions about the level of passenger rail service that will be provided to those markets in 2040



Infrastructure improvements, defined at a conceptual level, that would support the level of service identified

Between New York and Boston, several route options are being analyzed.

* * * * *

Each Action Alternative improves service on the existing NEC, achieves a state of good repair, and expands the range of services on the NEC. Each also protects freight rail access and the opportunity for future freight expansion.

More information on the alternatives, including assumptions regarding service levels, routes and potential new stations, will be provided in a Tier 1 EIS Alternatives Report, to be posted on the NEC FUTURE website this summer. The Tier 1 Draft EIS, with a detailed analysis of the alternatives and comparison against the No Action Alternative, will be released for public comment later this year.



Economic Development Workshops Inform Analysis

The analysis of the NEC FUTURE Alternatives, currently underway, includes a broad assessment of economic effects. To supplement the published data and economic forecasts being used in this assessment, the FRA conducted a series of Economic Development Workshops in October 2014. Nine workshops were held, each focusing on a different geographic market within the NEC FUTURE Study Area. The participants included experts representing different perspectives on development in the region, including private developers, local planning and economic development specialists, and academic institutions.

At each workshop, participants shared expert opinions on how improved passenger rail services could affect development and land values near stations, whether the pattern of development among the various metropolitan areas would be altered, and whether reduced trip times and increased service frequencies would lead to greater economic interaction among metropolitan areas and/or changes in labor markets.

Participants agreed that improved rail access and connectivity, particularly in new markets, could accelerate development. Participants in the Boston and New York workshops stressed the benefits for their labor markets in being able to attract skilled workers. Those in Baltimore, Wilmington, and Philadelphia saw opportunities for greater labor market integration among these urban areas with more frequent and cost-competitive rail service. For example, in both Wilmington and Baltimore, enhanced rail service was viewed as essential for recruiting talent and bringing jobs to their communities. Participants in both Long Island and Connecticut also felt that their economies could attract and retain jobs more successfully with the implementation of enhanced rail service.



Boston's South Station is located within easy walking distance of the city's growing financial and seaport districts.

The workshops also explored tradeoffs among reduced travel time, connectivity, and frequency of service. In the southern and central parts of the corridor, travel time was considered secondary to service frequency and connectivity in spurring development. In the northern portion of the corridor, travel time was valued more highly, with the potential for a convenient day trip between Boston and New York City perceived as a major benefit. At each workshop, participants cited connectivity to New York as a priority for economic development, suggesting that the economy of the corridor will remain "New York-centric" even as smaller markets become more integrated over time.

Rail access to airports was another key theme. In Baltimore, improved access to Baltimore-Washington International Airport was seen as a means to help the airport expand and generate jobs, as well as supporting the burgeoning technical industry near the airport. Similarly, participants in Stamford viewed better airport access as a way to attract and retain business in central Connecticut.

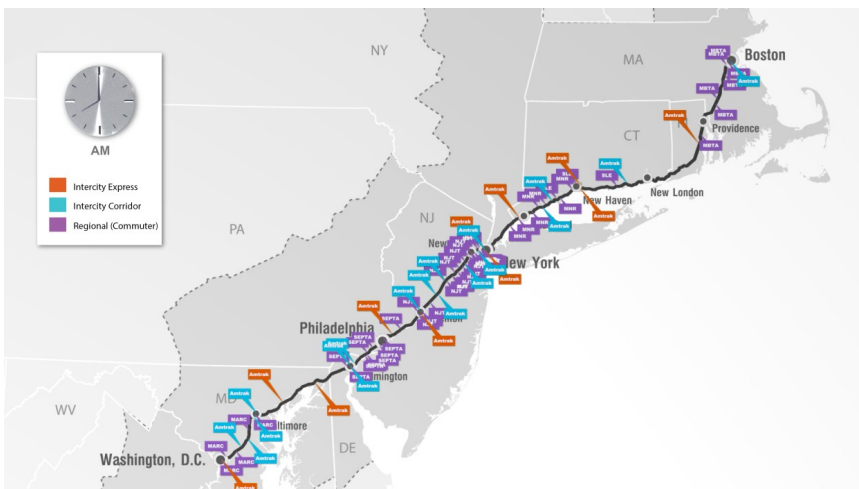
The workshop findings are being used to develop qualitative factors for consideration along with the quantitative measures to be used in the economic effects assessment. The results will be summarized in the Tier 1 Draft EIS.



Tier 1 EIS Alternatives Introduced at Public Open Houses—cont'd from page 1

The meetings were attended by a cross section of the population along the corridor and included local residents and businesses, agency representatives, elected officials, real estate and development organizations, and university students. Discussions at each meeting covered a wide range of topics. Common themes included the need to fix the existing NEC, its importance to the regional economy, the potential for station area development, airport connections, affordable fares, bicycle access, and easier ticketing. Participants also expressed interest in knowing more about the cost and phasing of improvements, and whether there would be an ability to combine elements from more than one alternative (answer: yes, depending on the results of the analysis and public comment period on the Tier 1 Draft EIS).

A brief survey conducted at the meetings gathered additional public feedback. Participants were asked what types of service enhancements would lead them to use NEC rail service more often, with the option of choosing more than one answer. The top factors cited were reduced travel time (mentioned by 59% of respondents), more frequent trains (50%), and lower fares (40%). Nearly 90% of respondents indicated a favorable view of the information provided at the meetings. Comments received from the public provided valuable input to the NEC FUTURE team and will be considered in the evaluation of the alternatives.



Animation of NEC train movements as shown at public open house meetings

How Can I Get Involved?



Visit our website

Please visit www.necfuture.com to learn more about NEC FUTURE and opportunities for public involvement.



Stay up to date on project news

Sign up for the email list to receive project updates.



Tell us what you think

Submit a comment or question to the NEC FUTURE team by completing the online comment form.



Attend a public hearing

FRA anticipates publishing the Tier 1 Draft EIS this fall. Public hearings will follow in each of the NEC states and the District of Columbia to provide an opportunity for public comment. The draft document and information on the hearings and other ways to provide comments will be posted on the website.

For Additional Information:

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